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ABSTRACT

Study tested whether general differences between Asian and European-American cultures (interdependent vs. independent orientation, levels of self-disclosure and conflict in social relationships) would have an effect on the supervisory process of counseling trainees. On the context of weekly group supervision, first-year counseling trainees were assessed every 2 weeks (6 times total) on measures of Working Alliance and Self-Disclosure. As hypothesized, there were significant differences in the temporal patterns of both measures between Caucasian (N=19) and Asian/Asian-American (N=17) trainees. Caucasian supervisees showed a consistently high level of Self-Disclosure and a characteristic high-low-high pattern of Working Alliance. In contrast, Asian supervisees showed a gradually increasing level of Self-Disclosure and a more stable level of Working Alliance. It was noted that the patterns of Working Alliance discussed in the counseling literature were typical of the Caucasian supervisees, but not the Asian supervisees. This result highlights the fact that the traits associated with good supervisees (openness, comfortable expressing conflict) come out of Western socio-cultural norms. It is recommended that supervisors take cultural differences into account when working with and evaluating the progress of their supervisees. (Contains 21 references, 3 figures, and an appendix of the test instruments.) (Author/JDM)

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CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN ALLIANCE FORMATION DURING GROUP SUPERVISION

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Cultural Differences in Alliance Formation During Group Supervision

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ABSTRACT

We tested whether general differences between Asian and European-American cultures (interdependent vs. independent orientation, levels of self-disclosure and conflict in social relationships) would have an effect on the supervisory process of counseling trainees. In the context of weekly group supervision, first-year counseling trainees were assessed every 2 weeks (6 times total) on measures of Working Alliance (Bordin, 1983) and Self-Disclosure (Yourman & Farber, 1996). As hypothesized, there were significant differences in the temporal patterns of both measures between Caucasian (N=19) and Asian/Asian-American (N=17) trainees. Caucasian supervisees showed a consistently high level of Self-Disclosure and a characteristic high-low-high pattern of Working Alliance. In contrast, Asian supervisees showed a gradually increasing level of Self-Disclosure and a more stable level of Working Alliance. We noted that the patterns of Working Alliance discussed in the counseling literature were typical of the Caucasian supervisees, but not the Asian supervisees. This result highlights the fact that the traits we associate with "good" supervisees (openness, comfortable expressing conflict) come out of Western socio-cultural norms. We recommend supervisors take cultural differences into account when working with and evaluating the progress of their supervisees.

Introduction

As the literature on cross-cultural issues in counseling have increased exponentially in the last 20 years, much has been written on the culture-bound nature of counseling (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990; Sue & Zane, 1987; Casas, 1984) and cross-cultural issues in training and education (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; McRae & Johnson, 1991; Ponterotto & Casas, 1987). However, the intercultural dynamics in supervision have received little or no attention. Several models of cross-cultural supervision have been developed on a theoretical level (Brown & Landrum-Brown, 1995; Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Morgan, 1984), but empirical studies on cross-cultural supervision are very scarce and limited (Leong & Wagner, 1994).

There is a growing body of knowledge which suggests that people from different cultures hold divergent views about the self and these views, in turn, play a major role in mediating various psychological and counseling processes (Kagawa-Singer & Chung, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Hsu, 1985). According to Hsu (1985, 1971), individuals socialized in Western cultures to have an independent self view a part of their self as "expressible" or readily accessible to others. On the other hand, individuals socialized in non-Western cultures with an interdependent self tend to approach others initially with a more formal, "public" face; however, once trust is established and the other is integrated on a more personal level, the private aspects of the self are made available. Another salient difference in these two models of the self concerns the role of conflict. From the perspective of the independent self, once a relationship is formed, individual needs will tend to be expressed and negotiated via conflict and reparation

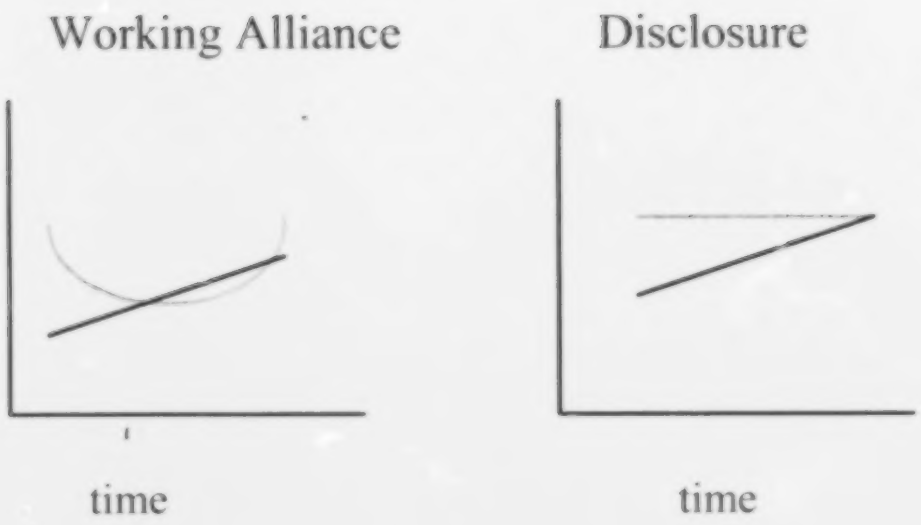
(Bordin, 1983; Tracey, Sherry, & Albright, 1999). From the vantage of an interdependent self, the relationship involves an inclusion of the other within the boundaries of one's self, and sources of conflict are controlled and regulated in order to maintain harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The literature suggests that the interdependent self is especially prominent in Asian cultures (Hsu, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Given the significance of working alliance and disclosure in supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Bordin, 1983; Yourman & Farber, 1996), Hsu's model of different construals of self has important implications for supervision with Asian supervisees. Supervisees growing up in an Asian cultural and family environment will tend to have a more layered, interdependent self. Thus they may be more likely to approach the supervision on a more formal and polite level initially, with more complete disclosure occurring over time. Similarly, the bond between supervisee and supervisor may be likely to strengthen steadily, without marked conflict. By contrast, Caucasian supervisees will tend to adopt a more independent self; they may be relatively more open in a supervisory context, but as their relationship with their supervisor progresses, it may be more vulnerable to decreases in rapport due to conflict.

The present study is designed to investigate whether these expected differences occur in the disclosure and working alliance patterns of Caucasian and Asian supervisees. To test this, we measured levels of disclosure and working alliance over a semester for beginning counseling trainees participating in group supervision. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

1) These two ethnic groups will differ in terms of the progression of disclosure and working alliance over time.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Trends for Caucasians and Asians



2) Caucasians will show a curvilinear pattern of working alliance, with a drop in the middle of the semester indicative of conflict. Asians will show a steady increase in working alliance.

3) Caucasians will show a higher level of disclosure initially, but Asians will show a greater increase in disclosure over the course of the semester.

See Figure 1 for a graphical representation of these hypotheses.

Methods

PARTICIPANTS

The participant pool consisted of 42 first- and second-year graduate students at a California university. This pool comprised all students enrolled in a course designed to teach basic counseling skills. Thirty-seven were first-year students and 5 were second-year students. Nine were counseling psychology PhD students, 28 were marriage and family therapist (MFT) masters students, and 5 were postsecondary administration and student affairs (PASA) masters students. These students had an average of 1.3 years of previous counseling experience and 0.7 years of supervision. In terms of other demographic variables, 6 (14%) were male and 36 (86%) were female; 19 (45%) were of Caucasian background, 17 (40%) were of Asian background (Asian, Asian-American, Indian-American, or Pacific Islander) and 6 (14%) had other ethnic backgrounds (3 Latino, 2 African-American, 1 Persian). Comparisons among these three ethnic groups in terms of generations in the United States, primary language, and gender makeup are shown in Table 1. Since our main interest is in Asian-Caucasian differences, the students with

Table 1: Breakdown of Participant Pool by Ethnicity

	Caucasian (N=19)	Asian[1] (N=17)	Other Ethnicity[2] (N=6)
Mean # of Generations in the U.S.	3.8	1.2	3.5
% English as Primary Language	100%	53%	100%
# Male / # Female	2 / 17	1 / 16	3 / 3

[1] Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander

[2] Latino, African-American, Persian. These participants were excluded from the analyses.

other ethnic backgrounds were not included in the present analyses. Thus, our final sample is 36 students; 19 Caucasian and 17 Asian.

PROCEDURES

As part of the counseling skills class, each student was required to attend weekly group supervision sessions (1 hour each) conducted by one of 6 advanced counseling PhD students. Students were nonrandomly assigned to supervision groups on the basis of compatibility of schedules between supervisee and student supervisor. Supervision groups met over the course of the semester, for a total of 13 weeks. Participants (supervisees) were given pretests and posttests measuring their opinion of their own counseling competence, and supervisors also rated each of their supervisees on their observed counseling skills. At six points during the semester, corresponding to class meetings following the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, and 13th group supervision session, participants were given four measures: group cohesion, supervisory style, working alliance, and disclosure. For the present study, working alliance and disclosure were selected for analysis, as they most directly tap the areas of trust, relationship formation, and openness that we hypothesize to differ between Caucasian and Asian participants. The measures of supervisory style, group cohesion, and the pre- and post- variables have not yet been analyzed, and will be handled in a future report.

For a measure of the ongoing working alliance between supervisee and group supervisor, we adapted the Working Alliance Inventory for use in a supervisory context. This instrument was developed by Hovarth (1981, 1982) to tap 3 dimensions of the alliance between client and counselor: similarity of **goals**, agreement on the counseling **tasks** necessary to attain those goals, and the strength of the emotional **bond**. The instrument was adapted for use in supervision by

substitution of "supervisor" for "therapist" (Malakuti, 2000); Bordin's (1983) model of the three alliance dimensions applies to both contexts. We used the brief 12-item version of this instrument, 4 items for each dimension. Each item allows a response along a 7 point Likert scale (1=Never to 7=Always); items were averaged across each dimension, and the sum of the three dimensional scores was used as the working alliance score. Possible scores ranged from 3 to 21.

The supervisee's level of disclosure was measured by an adapted nondisclosure scale from Yourman and Farber's (1996) Supervisory Quesionnaire. The original scale measured how comfortable supervisees felt sharing certain issues with their individual supervisor. Some of the items were reworded to include the supervision group (as well as the supervisor) as the audience for supervisee's disclosure. The 11 items were rated on a 7 point Likert scale. Scores were averaged across items and multiplied by 3 to provide a comparable range to the working alliance scores. The adapted versions of both working alliance and disclosure instruments used in the present study are contained in the Appendix. Internal consistency reliabilities were .69, .70, and .54 for the three subscales (goals, tasks, and bond) of the working alliance, .87 for the overall working alliance, and .76 for the disclosure scale (Cronbach's alpha).

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

The data were analyzed using a doubly multivariate repeated measures ANOVA, with ethnicity (Caucasian or Asian) as the between groups factor, and time as the within groups factor. As noted above, each point in time was represented by two dependent measures, working alliance and disclosure. Contingent on the statistical significance of the overall MANOVA, separate repeated measures ANOVAs were run for each measure (working alliance and self-disclosure), with polynomial contrasts used to detect trends in these measures over time

The data was not complete at all data points, and the number of participants for each week varied from 28 to 34 out of 36. For the purposes of ANOVA analysis, any missing values were replaced with the mean of the appropriate ethnic group for that week and measure. It is also noted that assignment to both ethnic group and group supervisor was nonrandom. Therefore, causal conclusions about the role of ethnicity in regard to the dependent measures should be interpreted cautiously. Also, the possibility exists that ethnic groups were unequally assigned to supervisors who may be variable in their promotion of alliance formation and supervisee disclosure, thus confounding ethnic group differences. This latter question will be evaluated by running a second repeated measures MANOVA with supervisor as the between groups factor. If this results in a significant between groups effect or interaction, the trends for each supervisor will be examined to determine if any observed ethnic group effects can be better accounted for by supervisory group membership.

Results

Doubly multivariate repeated measures ANOVA was used as an omnibus test of the main effects of ethnic group and time and the ethnic group-time interaction on both working alliance and disclosure simultaneously, using the covariances between measures to control for type I error. Box's M was nonsignificant, $F(78,3551)=1.11$, indicating that equality of the covariance matrices for the two ethnic groups can be assumed. The main effect of ethnic group was nonsignificant, Wilks' lambda (Λ)=.90, $F(2,33)=1.77$, and the main effect of time was marginally significant, $\Lambda=.53$, $F(10,25)=2.22$, $p=.052$. However, the time by ethnic group interaction was significant, $\Lambda=.45$, $F(10,25)=3.10$, $p=.011$, indicating that any overall temporal

trends in the supervisory measures were overshadowed by differences in how the two ethnic groups respond over time.

Given this result, a repeated measures ANOVA was run for each measure, with polynomial contrasts used to specify the nature of temporal effects over the semester. With working alliance as the dependent measure, the main effect of ethnic group ws again nonsignificant. Both the main effect of time, $\Lambda=.61$, $F(5,30)=3.83$, $p=.008$, and the interaction between time and ethnic group, $\Lambda=.66$, $F(5,30)=3.07$, $p=.024$, were significant. Polynomial contrasts revealed significant overall quadratic ($p=.043$) and quartic ($p=.023$) trends for the combined sample, and a significant quadratic trend ($p=.007$) for the differences between ethnic groups. Examining the plots for each group in Figure 2, it is noted that both group's trends are flattened at the beginning and end of the semester. However, whereas the Asian supervisees' scores are relatively stable throughout the semester, the Caucasian supervisees show a more severe disruption in the alliance at mid-semester (weeks 7 and 9).

Repeated measures ANOVA with disclosure as the dependent measure resulted in a significant time by ethnic group interaction, $\Lambda=.68$, $F(5,30)=2.88$, $p=.031$, but the main effects of time and ethnic group were not significant. Polynomial contrasts reveal significant quadratic ($p=.037$) and quintic ($p=.019$) trends for the differences between groups. This can be interpreted through examination of the plots of disclosure for each group (Figure 3). For Caucasians, level of disclosure remained relatively constant (and higher than that for Asians), except for a dip at week 9. Asian supervisees, however, showed a marked increase in disclosure until week 9, with a slight drop at the last week.

To check for supervisor-specific effects that may have confounded the ethnic group differences we observed, doubly multivariate repeated measures ANOVA was once again run on

Figure 2: Mean Working Alliance, Separated by Ethnic Group

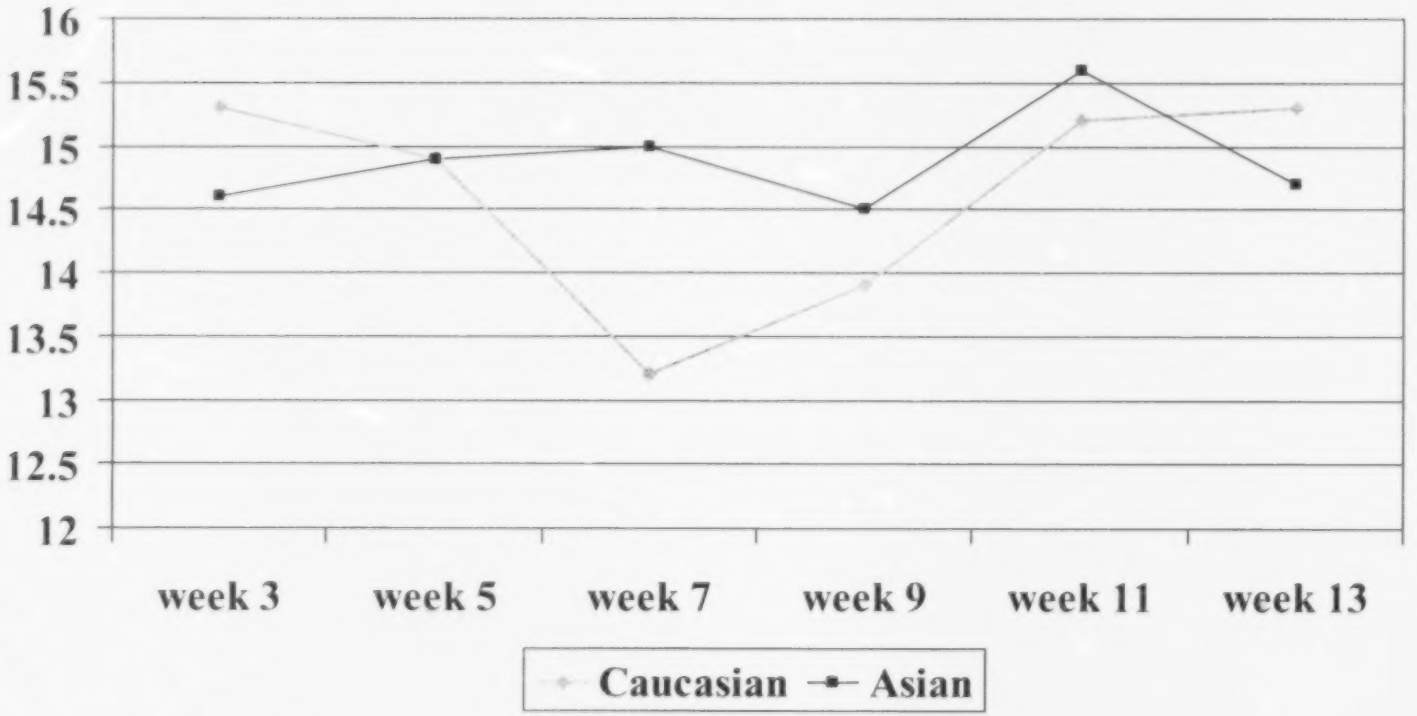
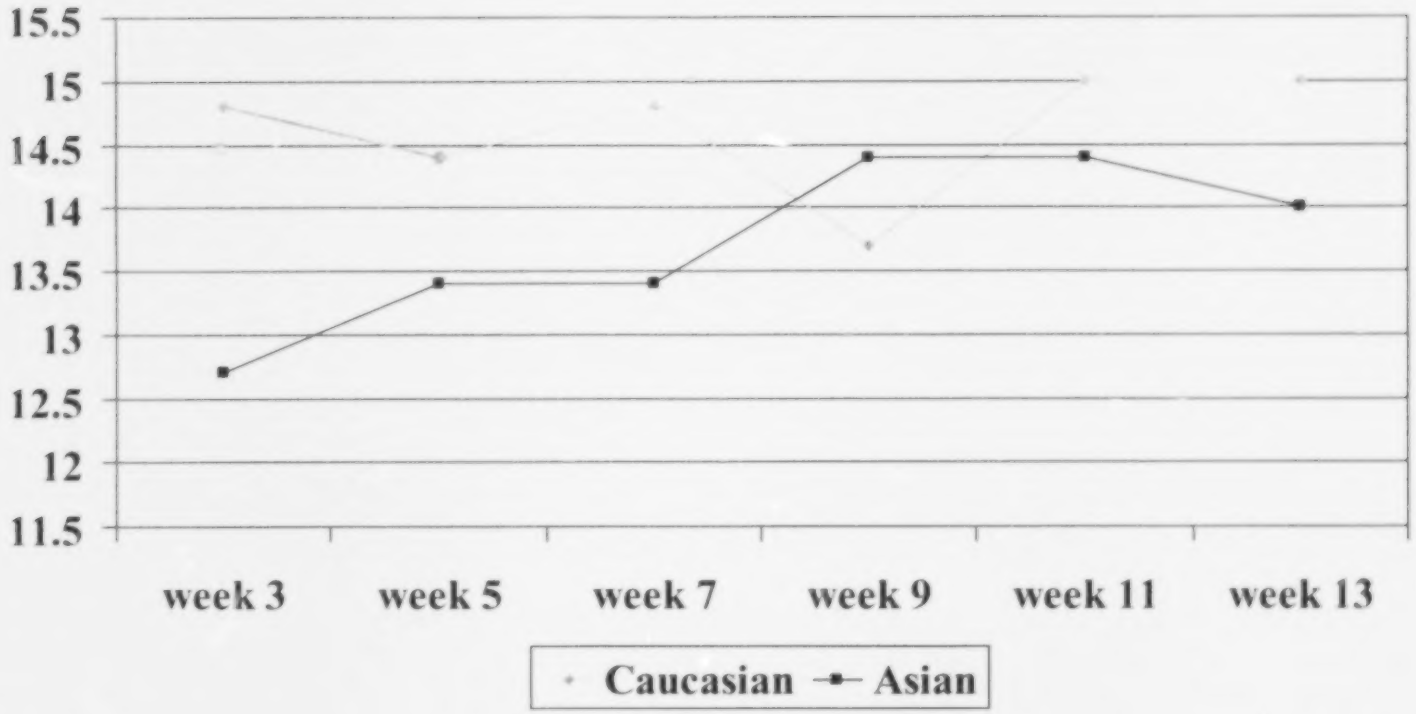


Figure 3: Mean Disclosure, Separated by Ethnic Group



the dependent measures of working alliance and disclosure. This time, supervisor (6 levels) was used as the between-subjects factor instead of ethnic group. Neither the main effect of supervisor, Λ=.72, F(10,58)=1.05, nor the interaction between supervisor and time, Λ=.18, F(50,99.1)=.89, were significant. This helps support our original hypotheses of ethnic group differences, as the particular supervisor one was assigned to is not a significant confound.

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

1) Significant ethnicity X time effects were observed for both variables of interest; suggesting that Asians and Caucasians differ in how they view the strength of the supervisory alliance and their own level of disclosure over the course of three month group supervision.

2) Caucasian supervisees appear to register a midpoint disruption in the alliance between themselves and their supervisor, consistent with Bordin's (1983) and Tracey and colleagues' (1999) models of weakening and repair in the therapeutic relationship. Asian supervisees, by contrast, do not show any substantial weakening of the alliance suggestive of conflict. This may reflect a cultural value of sublimating conflict towards the preservation of harmony in close relationships, as outlined by Hsu (1985) and Markus and Kitayama (1991); however, given the lack of notable increase in the alliance, it is also possible that the supervisor maintained a distant, professional position for these supervisees throughout the semester, and that the observed alliance reflected a polite, formal agreement more than a personal convergence of values.

3) Conflict and repair dynamics should perhaps be reframed as expressing and reconciling individual needs, and as such, may not be as salient for supervisees coming from a

primarily interdependent orientation; instead, these supervisees may manifest change through a gradual incorporation of the supervisor's values and actions.

4) As expected, Caucasians' level of disclosure tended to stay at a relatively high level throughout the semester, perhaps reflecting an acceptance of contextual expectations (i.e. those of the counseling profession) to be open. It is noted that even during the sharp drop in alliance during weeks 7 and 9, that disclosure showed only a minor decrease; this is suggestive of the Western norm of openly expressing disagreement and conflict in social relationships.

5) Also as predicted, Asians' level of disclosure gradually increased over the semester, supporting the notion that establishing trust in the supervision group is necessary before personal thoughts and feelings are revealed.

6) Since the counseling culture expects counselors / therapists to be open and self-disclosive to each other, and tends to associate such openness with psychological maturity and honesty, supervisors must be sensitive to the fact that this expectation comes out of Western sociocultural norms. Otherwise, supervisors risk experiencing the Asian supervisee as rigid and distant and evaluating him or her as lacking psychological sophistication and as unwilling to discuss their feelings about the case. For supervisees coming from a primarily interdependent orientation, more attention should be paid to the increase (or stagnation) in disclosure over time rather than the openness displayed at the outset.

Limitations of the Present Study

1) Due to small sample sizes, replication is needed to verify the stability of the observed patterns.

2) Nonrandom sample selection and assignment to supervision group may have resulted in unforeseen confounds that may distort ethnic group differences. Level of acculturation within ethnic groups, supervision group process effects, latency between group meeting and classroom assessment, program-specific recruitment patterns are examples of possible confounding factors.

3) Due to the small proportion of men in our sample, the results may only be generalizable to female counseling trainees.

4) The temporal patterns of alliance and disclosure for other non-Western ethnic groups, which share an interdependent orientation, were not evaluated; thus it is unclear if the observed differences are reflective of a specific Caucasian-Asian cultural difference or a more basic independent/interdependent contrast.

5) The observed patterns are group trends, which may tell us little about the supervisory dynamics of any one particular supervisee. It may be useful to compare individuals' patterns of scores with their qualitative feedback on the group experience to increase our understanding of the situational dynamics resulting in high or low alliance or disclosure ratings.

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Appendix

The following pages contain copies of the actual test instruments given to participants. The first page is the working alliance measure adapted from Hovarth (1982). The second page is the disclosure measure adapted from Yourman and Farber (1996). Note that the titles of the instruments were omitted from each form in an effort to partially disguise their nature.

Please feel free to respond with any comments, feedback, or requests for more information.

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INSTRUCTIONS Please indicate the extent to which each statement describes the way you thought or felt about your supervisor in the last session

1 My supervisor and I understand each other

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

2 I believe the time my supervisor and I are spending together is not spent effectively

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

3 My supervisor does not understand what I am trying to accomplish in supervision

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

4 I am clear as to what my supervisor wants me to do in these sessions

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

5 I feel that my supervisor is not totally honest about his or her feelings about me

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

6 My supervisor perceives accurately what my goals are

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

7 I believe the way we are working on issues is correct

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

8 I feel uncomfortable with my supervisor

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

9 My supervisor and I have different ideas about what my learning needs are

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

10 I find what my supervisor and I are doing in supervision is unrelated to my needs

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

11 My relationship with my supervisor is very important to me

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

12 We have established a good understanding between us about the kinds of changes that would be good for me

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

W

INSTRUCTIONS Please indicate which best reflects how you have responded in your last group supervision session.

1 I felt comfortable discussing my angry feelings toward my clients with my supervision group.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

2 I felt comfortable discussing my feelings of inadequacy as a clinician in the supervision.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

3 When I have interacted with clients in ways I thought the group might disapprove of, I have been honest in describing these interactions.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

4 I have felt comfortable letting my supervisor and/or any of the other group members in supervision know my positive feelings about him or her.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

5 When I have thought that my supervisor has been wrong, I have let him or her know it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

6 I have felt comfortable openly disagreeing with the other group members in supervision.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

7 I have felt embarrassed or afraid of how the supervision group would react to something I reported about my work.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

8 I have found myself telling my supervision group what I felt they wanted to hear.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

9 I have felt comfortable letting my supervisor and/or the other group members know my negative feelings about him or her.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

10 I have omitted describing details of my work that I have felt were clinical errors.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always

11 I was less than entirely honest in letting my supervision group know my theoretical or clinical views.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Always